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SUBJECT: JORDAN: USAID Global Engagement Follow-up

Ref: A) Amman 2516 B) Amman 2515 C) Amman 2487 D) Amman 1676

¶1. This cable is the fourth of four cables following up on the October visit to Amman of NSC Senior Director for Global Engagement Pradeep Ramamurthy. It outlines aspects of Embassy Amman's efforts to advance goals emphasized in the President's June 4 speech in Cairo.

¶2. USAID/Jordan is actively engaging with Jordanians to advance the President's vision that "education and innovation will be the currency of the 21st century." This year alone, the Mission's education and economic growth programs reached more than 85,000 Jordanian youth with job and life skills training, internships, and job placement help. With the launch of an innovative, cross-sectoral partnership with the International Youth Foundation, this number will grow each year with the expansion of services and training to Jordan's most marginalized young people. This sharp focus on opportunities for youth is complemented by USAID's broader emphasis on women's rights, human rights, and economic opportunity, three other priority Global Engagement themes.

ENGAGING YOUTH

¶3. President Obama said in Cairo, "no development strategy can be sustained while young people are out of work." In Jordan, a majority of the unemployed are ages 15-29, and over 70% of the population is under age 30. Paired with increasing urbanization, resource scarcity, and gender issues, Jordan faces tremendous challenges as it enters the 21st century. USAID/Jordan enjoys a strong and longstanding partnership with the Government of Jordan that is focused sharply on addressing these current and future development issues.

¶4. USAID's strategy, linked closely to Jordan's action plan for national development, the National Agenda, centers on a balanced portfolio of human capacity building, policy, and infrastructure investments in education, health, water, environment, governance, economic growth, and energy. Crosscutting youth and urban poverty alleviation initiatives unite these sectors to address Jordan's pressing urbanization and demographic challenges.

¶5. USAID has had particular success in programs that provide education for employment opportunities. These programs collectively served more than 85,000 Jordanian youth in 2008 through job fairs, internships, and job/life skills training. In 2010, this number will increase with the addition of an International Youth Foundation (IYF) program that equips Jordan's most marginalized youth with the tools that they need to prepare for employment in competitive industries. Engagement with youth includes:

- support to the Ministry of Education in graduating students well

prepared for the job market through school-to-career programs, a management information curriculum stream, teacher training, and giving the youngest students an excellent start through a modernized early childhood education system. USAID also provides extensive support for building and renovating schools equipped with up-to-date facilities and technology;

- INJAZ, a Jordanian effort to boost entrepreneurship skills among high school students that reaches 50,000 youth per year;
- MAHARAT, a similar effort on the university level that links university graduates with the job market through training, mentoring by local business leaders, and internships;
- a new youth program led by IYF that serves marginalized, out-of-school, and/or unemployed youth ages 15-24 with programs aiming to build job and life skills so that they may lead healthier lives and engage more fully in economic and social life and in Jordan's development; and
- a major public outreach push to connect youth with USAID-supported programs. USAID support for International Youth Day in August 2009 brought over 2,000 youth from across Jordan to Jerash for a day of awareness-building activities on USAID development initiatives.

PROMOTING HUMAN RIGHTS AND WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION

¶6. The Royal Court and Government of Jordan have publicly championed girls' education and women's employment and empowerment, and taken important steps to strengthen the criminal code to address "honor" crimes and to increase sentences for rape and harassment (ref Amman 2307 and 1884). Both in government and the NGO community, Jordan has increasingly strong voices for women's rights.

¶7. Yet challenges persist; girls and women in Jordan enjoy equal opportunities for education, but are less likely than their male peers to enter the labor force and to engage actively in leading their communities, whether in politics or via informal networks. Jordan ranked 113 of 134 countries in the World Economic Forum's 2009 Gender Gap report; the low rankings persist from previous years and are largely due to women's low rates of employment and political participation. Cultural attitudes towards women in the workforce limit women's employment choices. Perpetrators of "honor" killings have historically avoided harsh sentences, claiming their acts were committed at the height of passion and thus merit judicial leniency. USAID supports women's rights and participation through:

- capacity-building support for civic organizations engaged in legal and social service provision and awareness-raising activities for victims of violence;
- training a growing number of women judges. Over 50% of Judicial Institute graduates in 2009 were women, up from 43% just two years ago;
- rule of law assistance that has improved the Criminal Code to prohibit judges from shortening sentences in "honor" cases and to increase penalties for rape and harassment;
- support to civil society in improving legal protections for women under the Personal Status and Labor laws;
- support for capacity-building training for women parliamentarians, local officials, and candidates;
- an active focus on increasing women and girls' participation in training activities across the portfolio of USAID engagement, with a particular focus on workforce development. Examples include promoting women's participation in the tourism and hospitality labor force via training and job placement programs; and
- planned upgrades to local-level social services and assistance to girls, women, and families in poor urban areas via a cross-sectoral poverty alleviation initiative.

TOWARDS GREATER ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY

18. King Abdullah envisions his country moving swiftly into regional and global markets, as a center for 21st century information technology and service industries. Jordan has indeed made tremendous progress in this sphere, signing a Free Trade Agreement with the U.S., joining the World Trade Organization, and increasing both foreign and domestic investment markedly over the past several years. Current challenges include a skills mismatch between Jordan's labor force and its employers' needs, vulnerability to global and regional downturns due to heavy dependence on imported food and energy, extreme water scarcity, poorly controlled government expenditures, and a less than fully supportive macroeconomic climate for economic growth. USAID assists via:

- a wide range of workforce development initiatives that work from the policy to the people level to enhance capacity in Jordan's labor market. These programs include innovative public-private partnerships at the local level that pair Jordanians with jobs in their communities;
- tourism development programs that work with the Government of Jordan, the private sector, and the Royal Society for Conservation of Nature to enhance Jordan's competitiveness as an international destination and attract students to jobs in tourism, Jordan's most competitive industry. These programs are particularly notable for their contributions in reducing gender barriers that have traditionally prevented Jordanian women and girls from looking to this sector for future employment; vocational training programs engage families to reduce the stereotypes and stigma often associated with these jobs;
- planned local economic development initiatives linked to a broader urban poverty alleviation effort that will unite government, business, civic organizations, and city residents in improving their neighborhoods and livelihoods through microenterprise activities, training, investment promotion, and capacity-building;
- support for improved revenue collection and government budgeting;
- a water program that blends infrastructure investments in smarter water sourcing including wastewater treatment/reuse with policy-side interventions and public engagement to promote conservation and efficient use; and
- a new energy program that balances policy with public-private partnerships to leverage Jordan's tremendous potential to tap renewable energy resources to meet its population's needs.

ADDITIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

19. USAID is closely engaged with Jordan on multiple facets of Global Engagement, notably youth, women's participation, human rights, and economic opportunity. Cross-cutting energy, youth, and poverty alleviation programs hold tremendous promise as new elements of the U.S. assistance partnership with Jordan, and could benefit from additional resources via Global Engagement.

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